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PIONEERS ADS AND ADVERTISERS

BY J. M. GUINN.

About three thousand years ago, Solomon, King of Israel, remarked that there is nothing new under the sun. Solōmon had the reputation of being a wise man. No doubt he was. With 700 wives to keep him posted, he certainly ought to have been "up to date." Our inordinate conceit inclines us to believe Solomon somewhat of a back number and his sayings out of date, just as the Native Sons are inclined to regard the Pioneers as a little slow and their old yarns ancient history.

Self conceit is perhaps the most dominant characteristic of the present age. We pride ourselves on our wonderful achievements and draw invidious comparisons between the progressive present and the benighted past. And yet it may be possible that in the progress of the race for the past five or six thousand years there may have been more arts and inventions lost than we now possess.

Before the Christian era the Phoenicians made maleable glass, yet with all our wonderful discoveries in chemistry we have never yet been able to weld a broken pane. No modern artist has ever been able to make such permanent or so bright colors as the ancient painters used.

It is supposed that the original Argonaut, Jason, came home from Ithica on a steamboat. His vessel had neither oars nor sails to propel it. The remains of a railroad have been found among the ruins of Thebes. The Panama ship canal is just now one of the burning issues before Congress. An Isthmian canal is regarded as such a wonderful undertaking that it has taken the progressive nations of the world fifty years to talk about it before beginning to dig, yet Egypt, 5,000 years ago, dug a canal deeper, broader and longer than the Panama ditch will be when Congress gets through talking about it and some country digs it.

The crime of '73 was perpetrated in Assyria four thousand years before John Sherman or Wm. J. Bryan were born, and the question of the demonitization of silver was fought over during political campaigns in Babylon years before Nebuchadnezer was turned out to grass.

The discoveries that explorers are making among the buried cities of Assyria, Egypt and Greece reveal to us that many of our inventions are only the discovery of lost arts, and that Solomon was about correct when he remarked that there was nothing new under the sun.

It would not surprise me if some delver in Egyptian ruins discovered that that wonderful invention, the telephone, was known and used in the time of the Shepherd kings and that the children of Israel got the start of Pharaoh because the wires were crossed. It may be possible that some antiquarian may find hidden away in an Egyptian sarcophagus the mummy of a hallo girl, and when the mummy cloth has been lifted from her face she will sweetly lisp, "Line's busy; hang up, please."

Now all this may seem a little foreign to my subject, but I have introduced it here to vindicate Solomon. A man who could keep peace in a family as large as his was long enough to write a book of proverbs deserves our respect.

My subject, "Pioneer Ads and Advertisers," relates to the advertisers and advertisements in Los Angeles more than half a century ago. Recently in looking over some copies of the Los Angeles Star of fifty years ago I was amused and interested by the quaint ways the advertisers of that day advertised their wares and other things. Department stores are great advertisers and the pioneer department store of Los Angeles was no exception. Its ad actually filled a half column of the old Star, which was an astonishing display in type for those days. It was not called a department store then, but I doubt whether any of the great stores of Chicago or New York carry on so many lines of business as did that general merchandise store that was kept in the adobe house on the corner of Arcadia and North Main street fifty years ago. The proprietors of that store were our old pioneer friends, Wheeler & Johnson. The announcement of what they had to sell was prefaced by the following philosophical deductions which are as true and as applicable to terrestrial affairs to day as they were half a century ago.

"Old things are passing away," says the ad; "behold all things have become new. Passing events impress us with the mutability of human affairs. The earth and its appurtenances are constantly passing from one phase to another. Change and consequent progress is the manifest law of destiny. The forms and customs of the past are become obsolete and new and enlarged ideas are silently but swiftly moulding terrestrial matters on a scale of enhanced magnificence and utility.

"Perhaps no greater proof of these propositions can be adduced than the evident fact that the old mercantile system heretofore pursued in this community with its 7x9 stores, its exorbitant prices, its immense profits, its miserable assortments of shop-rotten goods that have descended from one defunct establishment to another through a series of years, greeting the beholder at his every turn as if craving his pity by a display of their forlorn, mouldy and dusty appearance. These rendered venerable by age are now considered relics and types of the past.

"The ever expanding mind of the public demands a new state of things. It demands new goods, lower prices, better assortments, and more accommodations. The people ask for a suitable consideration for their money and they shall have the same at the new and magnificent establishment of

"WHEELER & JOHNSON,

"in the House of Don Abel Stearns on Main street, where they have just received \$50,000 worth of the best and most desirable merchandise ever brought to the country."

When the customer had been sufficiently impressed by the foregoing propositions and deductions they proceed to enumerate, and here are a few of the articles:

"Groceries, soap, oil, candles, tobacco, cigars, salt, pipes, powder, shot, lead. Provisions, flour, bread, pork, hams, bacon, sugar, coffee. Dry Goods, broadcloths, cassimeres, blankets, alpacas, cambrics, lawns, gingham, twist, silks, satins, colored velvet, nets, crepe, scarlet bandanas, bonnets, lace, collars, needles, pins.

"Boots, shoes, hats, coats, pants, vests, suits, cravats, gloves, hosiery.

"Furniture, crockery, glassware, mirrors, lamps, chandeliers, agricultural implements, hardware, tools, cutlery, house-furnishing goods, liquors, wines, cigars, wood and willow ware, brushes, trunks, paints, oils, tinware and cooking stoves.

"Our object is to break down monopoly."

Evidently their method of breaking down monopoly was to monopolize the whole business of the town.

When we recall the fact that all of this vast assortment was stored in one room and sold over the same counter we must admire the dexterity of the salesman who could keep bacon and lard from mixing with the silks and satins, or the paints and oils from leaving their impress on the broadcloths and velvets.

Ladies' bonnets were kept in stock. The sales-lady had not yet made her appearance in Los Angeles and the sales gentleman sold bonnets. Imagine him fresh from supplying a purchaser with a side of bacon, fitting a bonnet on the head of a lady customer—giving it the proper tilt and sticking the hat pin into the coil of her hair and not into her cranium. Fortunately for the salesman the bonnets of that day were capacious affairs, modeled after the prairie schooner, and did not need hat pins to hold them on.

The old time department store sales gentleman was a genius in the mercantile line; he could dispose of anything from a lady's lace collar to a caballada of broncos.

Here is the quaint advertisement of our Pioneer barber. The Pioneer barber of Los Angeles was Peter Biggs—a gentleman of color who came to the state as a slave with his master, but attained his freedom shortly after his arrival. He set up a hair cutting and shaving saloon. The price for hair cutting was a dollar—shaving 50 cents. In the Star of 1853 he advertises a reduction of 50 per cent. Hair cutting 50 cents, shampooing 50 cents, shaving 25 cents. In addition to his tonsorial services he advertises that he blacks boots, waits on and tends parties, runs errands, takes in clothes to wash, iron and mend; cuts, splits and carries in wood; and in short performs any work, honest and respectable, to earn a genteel living and accommodate his fellow creatures. For character he refers to all the gentlemen in Los Angeles. Think of what a character he must have had.

Among the quaint advertisements in the old Star of the early 50s is this one, signed by Stephen C. Foster:

"The undersigned offers himself as a candidate for the office of Mayor in the election that will take place on the 25th inst.

"Confident that the motives which caused my resignation are good, as also my conduct afterwards and approved by my fellow citizens, I appeal to their judgment and let them manifest it by their votes."

On its face this advertisement has an innocent and inoffensive look, but between the lines old timers can read the story of a deep tragedy.

The motives which caused Mayor Foster to resign were to take part in a lynching. Two murderers, Brown, a native American, and Alvitre, a native Californian, had been convicted and sentenced to be hanged. Just before the day set for their execution a reprieve came for Brown, but the poor Mexican

was left to his fate. The people were indignant. A mob gathered for the purpose of seeing that either both were reprieved or both hanged. The sheriff proceeded with the execution of Alvitre. The mob threatened to prevent it. The military was called out and a bloody riot was imminent. At this point Mayor Foster harranged the people, advising that they allow the sheriff to proceed with the execution of Alvitre according to the forms of law. And when that was done he would resign the office of Mayor, head the vigilantes and execute Brown. He was as good as his word. The military was dismissed, their arms stacked in the jail, the sheriff's posse discharged. Then it was the vigilantes' chance. The Mayor resigned and joined the lynchers. The jail door was broken down, the arms of the military guards seized, Brown was taken out and hanged from a beam over the gate of a corral on Spring street, opposite where now stands the People's store, within two hours after the legal execution of Alvitre. A special election was called to fill the vacancy in the office of Mayor. So thoroughly and completely did his fellow citizens approve of Foster's course that he had no opposition and was the unanimous choice of the people.

There is often both tragedy and comedy, as well as business, mixed up in advertisements. In the *Star* of forty-eight years ago appears the ad of a great prize lottery or gift enterprise. It was called the Great Southern Distribution of Real Estate and Personal Property, by Henry Dalton. The first prize was an elegant modern-built dwelling house on the Plaza valued at \$11,000. There were 84,000 shares in the lottery, valued at \$1.00 each, and 432 first-class prizes to be drawn. Among the prizes were 240 elegant lots in the town of Benton. Who among you Pioneers can locate that lost and long since forgotten metropolis of the Azusa? The City of Benton. For some cause unknown to me the drawing never came off. A distinguished Pioneer whom many of you know sued Dalton for the value of one share that he (the Pioneer) held. The case was carried from one court to another and fought out before one legal tribunal after another with a vigor and a viciousness unwarranted by the trivial amount involved. How it ended I cannot say. I never traced it through the records to a finish.

Old ads are like old tombstones. They recall to us the memory of the "has beens;" they recall to our minds actors who have acted their little part in the comedy or tragedy of life and passed behind the scenes, never again to tread the boards.